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SUBJECT: Security in Nuristan -- The Enemy Within?

1. (SBU) Summary: Nuristan Province has seen an increase in security incidents since the establishment of a Coalition presence last fall. The situation became particularly acute this summer, with 21 separate attacks on Coalition or Afghan targets. While the frequency has declined since July, the PRT expects more attacks before the onset of winter. Significantly, despite claims to the contrary by Nuristani elders, a number of the attacks appear to have been undertaken by local insurgents. End Summary.

Cross-Border Influence...

2. (SBU) Over the last two months, PRT Nuristan has met with elders from throughout the province to discuss the difficult security situation. In every case the elders uniformly asserted that the insurgents were foreigners who were entering the province from Pakistan. They acknowledged that while a few locals could be involved, they argued that they were unimportant bit-players. Many also said more vigilance on the borders would reduce security incidents. These claims were echoed by Governor Tamim Nuristani, who asserted that the insurgency owes most of its strength to cross-border leadership. He complained that foreign insurgents had established a "training camp" in eastern Nuristan.

... Or the Kid Next Door?

3. (SBU) However, the facts seem to indicate otherwise. Insurgent radio communications are strictly in Kata and Kam-viri, which are neither spoken nor understood by more than a handful of non-native Nuristanis. On September 12 and 13, insurgents fired four mortars and an RPG round at the PRT's Forward Operating Base (FOB) in Nurgram District in southwestern Nuristan. (The attacks caused no damage.) After their second foray, the insurgents went back to their homes a few kilometers away. Local security forces say they know where they live, but complain that they lack the means to take action.

Keys to the Insurgency: Local Governance and Development

4. (SBU) While recent attacks on the PRT were ineffective, insurgent activity during July and early August claimed lives throughout the province. Camp Keating, in eastern Nuristan, was the target of some 21 attacks during the month of July. During the

course of the summer, insurgents also conducted attacks across Nuristan. Coalition operations have caused far more casualties among insurgents than the insurgents have inflicted on the Coalition. The absence, however, of a constant Afghan National Army (ANA) presence in the areas in which insurgent leaders live cedes a considerable amount of initiative to the insurgency.

15. (SBU) Although the governor points to Pakistan as the source of the insurgency, he acknowledges that his own cousin is one of the insurgent leaders in the province. One of the primary operational commanders of the insurgents in southwestern Nuristan lives in a house a few kilometers up the valley from the PRT. Clearly, these figures are not going to depart for the winter, and border controls will not affect them. The involvement in the insurgency of important figures with deep roots in Nuristan gives staying power to the insurgency. One problem is the lack of solid leadership on the part of elders at the town level. Traditionally, Nuristani towns decided issues on the basis of corporate decisions, with elders playing an important role. Thirty years of war, however, has altered the social fabric of Nuristan, leading to an increase in the influence of military and religious leaders relative to town elders. Nevertheless, elders remain important, and they can still play an important part in influencing popular positions in their towns. The provincial government and the PRT have focused on outreach to elders to encourage them to play a constructive role.

16. (SBU) Another key to the insurgency is the lack of development. The lack of employment has led some Nuristani young men to participate in actions against Coalition or government forces on a piece-work basis. Pakistani elements pay for attacks, and some local men find it tempting -- in the absence of other sources of income -- to take the money, fire off an ineffectual round, and run.

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